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QUESTIONS

Desertification and drought

Implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification and of the medium-term and of the medium term and long-term recovery and rehabilitation programme in the Sudano-Sahelian region

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in pursuance of Assembly resolution 48/175 of 21 December 1993, the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the overall implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, including implementation in the Sudano-Sahelian region.

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ANNEX

Implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification 1993-1994

Report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 35/73 of 5 December 1980, requested the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to report every other year to the Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, on the overall implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. Further, in its resolution 39/168 B of 17 December 1984, the Assembly requested the Governing Council to make the necessary arrangements at each session for submitting a report to the Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation in the Sudano-Sahelian region of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification.

2. In its decision 18/26, adopted on 26 May 1995, the Governing Council authorized the Executive Director to submit the present report, which includes her report on the implementation of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in the Sudano-Sahelian region, on behalf of the Council, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION 1993-1994

A. Technical assistance to Governments

3. In 1993-1994, UNEP continued to support Governments in developing and implementing national plans of action to combat desertification. The period was marked by an increase in activities as national plans of action were completed and launched, others began to be developed and other initiatives were begun.

4. National plans of action were launched and priority projects developed in Bahrain, Chile, Mexico, Mongolia, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Activities were initiated to develop national plans for Argentina, Bolivia and China, taking into account the more comprehensive approach demanded in the national action programmes to combat desertification called for under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (see A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II). Preparatory activities were undertaken in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakstan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Kalmykia in the Russian Federation.

5. In addition, UNEP assisted Governments in other desertification-related activities, including seminars and programme reviews. During the reporting period evaluations were carried out on pilot village projects in Zimbabwe and Uganda, under the Cairo Programme for African Cooperation of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

B. Regional actions and networks

6. In 1993-1994, UNEP provided assistance in the spheres of policy and strategy, project development, desertification assessment, information and

training, village workshops and sharing project experience, to subregional organizations in sub-Saharan Africa, the Conference of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment, the African Deserts and Arid Lands Committee and the Desertification Control Research and Training Network for Asia and the Pacific.

7. UNEP continued to serve as the secretariat for the African Deserts and Arid Lands Committee and to support the Desertification Control Research and Training Network for Asia and the Pacific, particularly in the establishment of a regional office for the Network at Tehran and the organization of regional meetings. It also collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to strengthen the Regional Technical Cooperation Network on Arid and Semi-arid Lands in the Latin American and Caribbean region and provided assistance to coordination meetings and for the publication of a network newsletter.

C. Training

8. In 1993-1994, 1,025 participants from developing countries attended training courses in different aspects of desertification control and dryland management, organized by UNEP and other members of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Desertification, namely the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the International Institute for Environment and Development.

D. Assessment and mapping

9. UNEP activity continued in this area, evaluating project results and organizing and supporting activities to develop assessment and mapping methodologies and make them operational in pilot countries such as China, Kenya and Pakistan. Various studies, meetings and workshops considered other aspects of desertification assessment and land management, such as the interaction between climate and desertification, soil resilience, the assessment of degradation in cultivated soils, indicators of sustainability, land quality and community evaluation of project activities, appropriate technologies for sustainable land management and economic valuation of environment and natural resources.

E. Evaluation and monitoring

10. As the task manager for reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development on progress in implementing chapter 12 of Agenda 21, UNEP, in cooperation with other organizations, prepared the thematic report on desertification.

11. The evaluation of recommended "success-story" activities was continued. Ten case-studies were evaluated, eight were selected as having succeeded in sustainably controlling desertification and three were nominated for consideration for the Global 500 Award.

12. In environmental monitoring, UNEP support continued to the World Soil and Terrain Database project, the results of which will be used for the new global assessment of desertification.

F. Information

13. Four issues of the Desertification Control Bulletin, a special issue of Our Planet on desertification, the World Map of Present-day Landscapes and a study on the interactions of desertification and climate were completed. Copies of publications and other documents on desertification control were disseminated widely.

III. COORDINATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

14. The marked increase in joint activities in desertification control within the United Nations system and with other organizations, such as non-governmental organizations, covered fields such as strategic planning, assessment methodologies, scientific aspects of desertification, environmental information systems and operational field activities. This was particularly evident during the negotiation process of the Convention, where coordinated support was provided to the ad hoc secretariat and to Governments in affected countries, in the definition of the technical scientific and political issues involved and in the formulation of the texts of the Convention and the regional annexes.

15. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations increased in line with the role assigned to them in Agenda 21 and the cross-cutting nature of desertification control led to a growth of cooperation with centres of excellence and academic institutions. Similarly, linkages between different aspects of desertification as reflected in the various chapters of Agenda 21 also encouraged cooperation and coordination.

IV. NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

16. UNEP played a notable role in the negotiation process for the Convention of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention to Combat Desertification, including by providing substantive, financial and technical support to the secretariat, to regional and subregional organizations, and to affected countries, for case-studies on desertification and for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the negotiation process. UNEP also contributed to the establishment of the International NGO Network on Desertification. The success of UNEP efforts in providing support to African Governments, non-governmental organizations and subregional organizations for the negotiation process is reflected in the fact that 42 of the 53 countries in Africa had signed the Convention by the end of 1994.

17. UNEP participated actively, with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), UNSO, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (ADB), in the joint secretariat, in the substantial input of OAU to the Convention and in the OAU Ad Hoc Group of Experts on desertification, which developed Africa's contribution to the negotiation process and drafted the Regional Implementation Annex for Africa, the resolution on urgent action for Africa and strategies for negotiating and implementing the Convention. In the second half of 1994, attention moved to planning activities for implementing the Convention, especially concerning urgent action in Africa, and to continuing support for the interim secretariat.

18. UNEP contributed substantively to background knowledge on desertification, particularly in relation to emerging issues. UNEP urged that the "right to remain" for those who so wished be incorporated in the Almeria Statement on desertification and migration. Studies on the social aspects of desertification, its effects on migration, the linkages between desertification and both biodiversity and climate were carried out and work on the subject of gender issues and desertification was begun. The workshop "Listening to the people: social aspects of dryland management", held at Nairobi in December 1993, aimed to develop a better understanding of "community participation" and "bottom-up development", in order to make recommendations for achieving sustainable development in the drylands. The success-story evaluations will provide tools for use in the community-level implementation of the national plans of action to combat desertification requested under the Convention.

V. FINANCING AND OTHER MEASURES IN SUPPORT OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

19. UNEP participated with the other Global Environment Facility (GEF) partners in the preparation of an issues paper on the funding of the incremental costs of activities concerning land degradation, as they relate to the four GEF focal areas and on the operational strategy paper, both for consideration by the GEF Council.

VI. ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SUDANO-SAHELIAN OFFICE

20. The UNSO programme focused on five major areas: the Convention process; national plans of action; drought preparedness and mitigation; environmental information systems; and local-level natural resource management. These were supported by information and resource mobilization activities.

21. In addition to support for African countries, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/UNSO, as a member of the joint secretariat, supported OAU in the negotiation process for the Convention, in subregional consultations and for the OAU Expert Group on Desertification. After June 1994, attention turned to the preparation of national plans of action to combat desertification, through support to national forums of partners, subregional organizations and non-governmental organizations.

22. The strategic framework processes programme continued, with attention being given to strengthening and ensuring coordination among national and local anti-desertification authorities; developing national plans of action; community empowerment; and harmonization in natural resource management programmes. In cooperation with the World Bank and ADB, the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa was established to operationalize the concept of sustainable development in Africa.

23. A programme was launched in East Africa to build capacity in drought-preparedness and mitigation in Ethiopia and provide support to the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development for the preparation of a regional disaster- and drought-management strategy.

24. Concerning environmental information systems, the focus was on improved national and regional exchange of environmental information on a demand-driven, participatory basis, through the definition of priority needs in information, training and institutional mechanisms to manage environmental information. Work to identify and test desertification indicators for use at project level also began.

25. Project reviews attempted to identify constraints on implementation at local level, and country dialogue to exchange information among natural resource management projects was promoted. New approaches to land management, pastoralism and community participation were studied and developed. Two innovative projects combining anti-desertification efforts with schemes for carbon sequestration were funded during the GEF pilot phase.

26. Information dissemination and the publication programme continued with the regular updates on negotiations by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, a poster and technical publications providing background information to major themes of the Convention.

27. In response to the demands of Agenda 21 and the Convention, negotiations were begun in order to reorient the joint venture mechanism into a partnership to implement chapter 12 of Agenda 21 world wide, and UNDP/UNSO began a resource mobilization campaign for the implementation of the Convention and, in particular, the resolution on urgent action for Africa.

28. As the central entity within UNDP coordinating UNDP system activities in desertification control, UNSO also developed a UNDP system-wide anti-desertification strategy.